

CONSUMER ALERT



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CHECK OVERPAYMENT SCAMS

The Delaware Department of Justice warns of a rise in check overpayment scams when selling items through online auctions or classifieds.

The scam typically involves someone responding to your posting or ad, and offering to use a cashier's check, personal check or corporate check to pay for the item you're selling. At the last minute, the so-called buyer comes up with a reason for writing the check for more than the purchase price, and asks you to wire back the difference after you deposit the check. Once the check is deposited and the funds are wired back to the "buyers" the check bounces, leaving you liable for the entire amount.

The Consumer Protection Unit has received a number of letters, calls and emails in recent months. Follow these tips to avoid becoming a victim:

- **Know who you're dealing with.** Confirm the buyer's name, street address, and telephone number.
- **Don't accept a check for more than the selling price.** Ask the buyer to write the check for the correct amount. If the buyer refuses to send the correct amount, return the check. Don't send the merchandise.
- **If you accept payment by check, ask for a check drawn on a local bank, or a bank with a local branch.** That way, you can make a personal visit to make sure the check is valid. If that's not possible, call the bank where it was purchased and ask if the check is valid. Get the bank's phone number from directory assistance or an Internet site that you know and trust, not from the person who gave you the check.
- **Consider an alternative method of payment.**
- **If the buyer insists that you wire back funds, end the transaction immediately.**
- **Resist any pressure to "act now."**
- **Ignore offers that ask you to pay for a prize or a gift.**
- **Resist the urge to enter foreign lotteries.**